

Photospot:

Juvenile Scaly Ground-roller *Geobiastes squamiger*

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Le juvénile du Brachyptérolle écaillé *Geobiastes squamiger*. Les oiseaux endémiques les plus recherchés par les ornithos visitant Madagascar comprennent les cinq espèces de brachyptérolles. Le plumage des jeunes demeure mal connu. Nous décrivons le juvénile du Brachyptérolle écaillé *Geobiastes squamiger* et en présentons deux photos.

The ground-rollers are among every birding visitor's favourites in Madagascar. The five species comprise the family Brachypteraciidae, recently reaffirmed, on DNA evidence, as a valid endemic family in the order Coraciiformes, which also include their closest relatives, the 'true' rollers Coraciidae (Kirchman *et al.* 2001). Formerly of near-mythical status, as they were thought to be very hard to see, visitors now regularly find all five species in relatively short visits; indeed, the four rainforest ground-rollers can be found in a single day in the Périnet-Mantadia area near Antananarivo.

However, their juvenile plumages remain very poorly known. A few juvenile specimens have been described (Sharpe 1892, Lavauden 1932, Benson *et al.* 1976), but only a single Scaly Ground-roller *Geobiastes squamiger*: a specimen at the 'ORSTOM museum' (now the Académie Malgache) at Tsimbazaza, Antananarivo, Madagascar, examined and briefly described by C. W. Benson (Benson *et al.* 1976). This specimen has not been mentioned in the literature since. A photograph of a chick at its nest entrance, a

few days prior to fledging, has been published (Rakotoarisoa & Be 2004), but few plumage details are discernible. (Incidentally, in case the genus name *Geobiastes* is unfamiliar, this monotypic genus was created for it by its original describer, and only later was the bird removed to the same genus as Short-legged Ground-roller *Brachypteracias leptosomus*. Recent genetic analysis has restored *Geobiastes* (Kirchman *et al.* 2001), and the correct spelling of the species name, if the bird is placed in this genus, is *squamiger*: Peterson 2011).

In recent years, the national conservation NGO, Asity Madagascar, has been implementing a programme of surveys, monitoring and conservation at Tsitongambarika Forest, in the far south-east of Madagascar (Pilgrim *et al.* 2011; see p. 18). On 19 October 2010, in lowland rainforest within a valley near Beseva village (24°43'03"S 46°56'05"E, at c.525 m above sea level), one of us (BR) encountered a pair of Scaly Ground-rollers with a single young, which he managed to photograph (Figs. 1–2).



Figures 1–2. Juvenile Scaly Ground-roller / Brachyptérolle écaillé *Geobiastes squamiger*, Tsitongambarika Forest, Madagascar, October 2010 (Bruno Raveloson)



Figures 3–4. Adult Scaly Ground-roller / Brachyptérolle écaillé *Geoblastes squamiger*, Masoala, Madagascar, October 2008 (Pete Morris)

It differs from the adult (shown here for comparison, Figs. 3–4) in being dull rufous over the crown, nape, breast and flanks, where the adult is at its scaliest; the chin and centre of abdomen are dingy white. The black stripes on the neck-sides are present as on the adult. The patterns of the flight and tail feathers are similar to those of the adults, but the wing-covert markings are much less distinct, and the bird has evidently fledged well before the tail is fully grown. In most respects, it resembles the short description of the specimen (Benson *et al.* 1976); however, a description hardly does justice to such an intricately patterned bird, and we hope that the photographs presented here are more informative.

Acknowledgements

We thank the staff of Asity Madagascar for arranging the survey work at Tsitongambarika, and Pete Morris (Birdquest) for permission to use his photographs.

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Received 16 May 2011.